

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BUJUMB 00978 080839Z

13

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5736

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY KIGALI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

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US MISSION USUN NEW YORK 0623

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0978

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, BY

SUBJECT: COLONEL BAGAZA MEETS FOREIGN AMBASSADORS

1. LATE NOVEMBER 6, EMBASSIES WERE INFORMED THAT COLONEL BAGAZA WOULD RECEIVE MISSION CHIEFS INDIVIDUALLY ACCORDING TO PROTOCOL PRECEDENCE NEXT (SUNDAY) MORNING. SINCE WAITING MY TURN WOULD HAVE KILLED A PLANNED TRIP TO BUKAVU WITH THE F.S. INSPECTORS, BAGAZA AGREED TO SQUEEZE ME IN EARLY AFTER SEEING THE ACTING DEAN.

2. THIS COURTEOUS GESTURE WAS FOLLOWED BY A RATHER EFFUSIVELY FRIENDLY TEN MINUTE SESSION. BAGAZA WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ANOTHER MAJOR NEW LEADER (AND OLD BELGIAN MILITARY ACADEMY BUDDY), LIEUT COLONEL NZAMBIMANA, PLUS THE TWO FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTORS GENERAL (ONE OF WHOM ACTUALLY TOOK NOTES, AN UNHEARD OF, BUT I HOPE NOT ONE SHOT, PLACTICE). THE TWO OFFICERS WERE EBULLIENT, RADIATING CONFIDENCE. BAGAZA SPOKE EASILY AND IN EXCELLENT FRENCH, AS HE SHOULD AFTER NINE YEARS IN BELGIUM AND A DEGREE IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, AS WELL AS HIS MILITARY TRAINING.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BUJUMB 00978 080839Z

3. BAGAZA SAID THAT I KNEW PERFECTLY WELL THE CONDITIONS WITHIN

BURUNDI WHICH HAD CAUSED THE ARMY TO OUST MICOMBERO. THERE HAD BEEN NO FOREIGN INFLUENCES BEHIND THE MOVE, NO RUSSIANS, NO CHINESE, AND (AS AN OBVIOUS AFTERTHOUGHT AND QUIP) "NOT EVEN ANY AMERICANS". THE NEW REGIME WAS GOING TO MAKE MAJOR CHANGES IN DOMESTIC LIFE, AND ITS WORK WOULD BE DIRECTED TO BRINGING ABOUT NOT ONLY NATIONAL UNITY BUT SOCIAL JUSTICE. I ASKED WHAT THE LATTER CATCHWORD WAS SUPPOSED TO MEAN, AND BAGAZA REPLIED, IN EFFECT, THAT THE MICOMBERO REGIME HAD RIPPED OFF THE PEASANTS AND WORKERS, AND THAT HENCEFORTH THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS WOULD BE DIRECTED TOWARD IMPROVING THEIR LOT.

4. I SAID THAT THE UNITED STATES WANTED TO CONTINUE WITH THE NEW LEADERSHIP THE SAME TIES THAT IT HAD HAD WITH BURUNDI PREVIOUSLY. INDEED, THOSE LINKS HAD BEEN GROWING GRADUALLY A BIT CLOSER, AND WE WERE STARTING A MODEST BILATERAL COOPERATION PROJECT. WE HAD BEEN SURE SINCE THE COUP THAT NO FOREIGN INFLUENCES HAD BEEN INVOLVED, BUT IT WAS GOOD TO HEAR BAGAZA CONFIRM THIS AND RESTATE A CONTINUATION OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE PAST.

5. AS FAR AS THE NEW DOMESTIC PROGRAM WAS CONCERNED, THAT WAS NOT AMERICAN BUSINESS. HOWEVER, AS AN IMPARTIAL OBSERVER, I COULD NOT HELP COMMENTING THAT SLOGANS WOULD MEAN LITTLE UNLESS THE LEADERSHIP HAD WELL THOUGHT OUT PLANS AND PROGRAMS, UNLESS IT SAW TO THEIR IMPLEMENTATION, AND UNLESS THE TOP MEN GOT OUT ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY REGULARLY AND OFTEN TO SPREAD THE WORD. ALL FOREIGNERS IN BUJUMBURA HAD KNOWN ABOUT THE PERVERSIVE CORRUPTION UNDER MICOMBERO AND HOW IT HAD EATEN AWAY AT GOVERNMENT IN BURUNDI. THIS WAS A TERRIBLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM TO TACKLE, BUT THE INDISPENSABLE KEY WAS THE EXAMPLE SET AT THE TOP, BY THE LEADERS' OWN PROBITY AND HONESTY. I RECALLED THAT I HAD ASKED OUR RECENTLY DEPARTED AMBASSADOR IN KIGALI (FRITTS) HOW HE HAD FOUND THE REACTIONS OF THE OFFICERS, WHO CAME TO POWER THERE IN 1973, TO THE TEMPTATIONS OF POWER. I SAID THAT I HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THE NEW RULERS HAD HLED THEMSELVES IN CHECK FOR TWO YEARS, BUT THAT, THEREAFTER, MERCEDES CARS HAD BEGUN TO REAPPEAR.

6. BAGAZA LAUGHED AT THIS (NZAMBIMANA WAS ALMOST CONVULSED) AND THEN SAID THAT I SHOULD TELL WASHINGTON THAT EVERYTHING WHICH I HAD SPOKEN ABOUT CORRESPONDED EXACTLY TO HIS OWN VIEWS AND THOSE OF HIS FELLOW OFFICERS. BEFORE LEAVING, I TOOK THE OCCASION TO INFORM

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PAGE 03 BUJUMB 00978 080839Z

HIM DIRECTLY OF THE PROBABLY IMPENDING VISIT BY CODEL DIGGS, WHICH, I NOTED, COULD CERTAINLY ADVANCE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

7. WE ARE TOLD THAT BAGAZA MADE SIMILAR REASSURING STATEMENTS TO OTHER WESTERN COLLEAGUES, TOLD THE BELGIANS THAT HE WAS NOT AT ALL ANTI-BELGIAN, AND ASKED ALL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES (INCLUDING AN IMPENDING VISIT BY EC COMMISSIONER CHEYSSON) TO CONTINUE AT FULL BLAST. THE FRENCH CHARGE REPORTS THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR

SAID TO HIM AFTERWARDS "HALF IN JEST" THAT THE NEW REGIME WAS A
WESTERN CREATION. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT BAGAZA TOLD ME
AND THE OTHERS THAT MICOMBERO AND NDABEMEYE WERE SAFE AND THAT NO
HARM WOULD COME TO THEM.
MARK

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